

To understand how this came about it is necessary to recapitulate briefly the story of the Habsburg dynasty and that of Francis Joseph's own reign; together they constitute a momentous and fascinating chapter in the chronicle of modern Europe. Such as it is, our world today owes more to both than we generally realize.

The Emperor crypt of the Capuchin chapel in the heart of Old Vienna is the family mausoleum of the Habsburgs. The dust of twelve emperors and fifteen empresses lies there in the golden gloom, watched over by four crowned skulls whose sightless eye sockets are turned toward the red and white tomb of Frederick III (d. 1493), the first member of the dynasty to use the title. To the modern eye there seems as much pride as humility in the baroque symbolism; there was a time when the Habsburg realms were second only to the universal monarchy for which the crowned skulls stand.

It was Frederick who adopted and carved over a gate of the Hofburg the boastful motto AEIOU, an interchangeable Latin-German anagram (*Austriae est imperare orbi universo* or *Alles Erdreich ist Oesterreich unterthan*) signifying that it is Austria's destiny to rule the world. In modest, pacific, republican present-day Austria, the words have a pathetic ring, but then, they never really applied to Austria. The Habsburgs were something else.

"In other countries dynasties are episodes in the history of peoples," comments A. J. P. Taylor, "In the Habsburg Empire peoples are a complication in the history of a dynasty . . . No other family has endured so long or left so deep a mark upon Europe."

The first Habsburg king was born in 1218, exactly 700 years before the last one, the Emperor Charles, abandoned his throne. Rudolph of Habsburg was a feudal lord whose possessions amounted to a few hundred acres of wooded rolling country on the Swiss plateau, in Alsace, and southern Germany. He descended from an already ancient family whose name derived from a castle built in the eleventh century: the "Habichtsburg" or castle of the hawk. The walls of the ruined keep, six feet thick, still stand and can be visited near Zurich, in Switzerland. From his ancestors—one of them was Count of Zurich—Rudolph had inherited the protectorate over the "Waldstätte," the original Swiss cantons whose struggle against their Habsburg overlords was later dramatized in the legend of Wilhelm Tell.

It was not his riches or military strength, but rather the lack of them, that caused Rudolph to be elected "King of the Romans" as the rulers of Germany were then called. This was an optimistic appellation; it is true that the Holy Roman Empire had become the Holy Germanic Roman Empire since a German king, Otto the Great, had knelt before the Pope in

Habsburg
Empire

Rome to be crowned with Charlemagne's Golden Crown and hailed like him, Caesar and Augustus, but it had become a hollow title. Medieval Europe had curdled into hundreds of small warring States, whose lords would tolerate no king but one of their own choosing, and the monarchy had become elective. When Rudolph was finally chosen, the crown had gone begging for over twenty years; no one cared to rule the hornets' nest of nearly four hundred feudal baronies which in French chronicles of the day is referred to as "*Les Allemagnes*" and where no writ prevailed but that of the "*Faustrecht*" (Law of the mailed fist).

Rudolph turned out to be more than the German princes had bargained for. Defeating the King of Bohemia, he acquired the Ostmark (roughly Austria and northern Yugoslavia) and thus became the richest landowner in the empire; its wary prince-electors took prudent note and returned the imperial crown to Habsburg hands only intermittently for the next two hundred years. In the fifteenth century however, a Habsburg Emperor, Frederick III, finally made it practically hereditary by the simple device of having his son elected heir-presumptive during his lifetime; successive Habsburgs adopted the practice as a family tradition. The same Frederick, a colorless but ambitious ruler, founded another Habsburg tradition, that of expansion by matrimony. "*Bella gerant alii, tu, felix Austria, nube*" ("Let others wage war, but you, happy Austria, marry") became the unofficial Habsburg motto.

Frederick's son, Maximilian, (1459-1519) who married the Netherlands and a nice strip of eastern France, perfected the policy. He betrothed his heir to a bride whose intellect was cloudy but whose dowry was brilliant; Joan the Crazy, daughter to their Most Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain (and, thanks to Christopher Columbus, of certain lands beyond the ocean sea). The Spanish connection also brought to the Habsburgs the pompous, stiff etiquette of Isabella's court (which was still being observed at that of Francis Joseph), the narrow foreheads and drooping mouths immortalized in the canvasses of Velasquez, the strain of melancholy or even occasional madness that kept cropping up in the family, and the blight of Castillian bigotry; these were the days when the smoke of the Spanish Inquisition's *autos-da-fe* darkened the Mediterranean sky.

With Maximilian the Habsburgs began to bulge out of their purely German frame and become a European dynasty, but Maximilian himself, depicted in a portrait by Albrecht Durer as a sharp-nosed splendid, *grand seigneur*, was above all a Viennese. He was born in the city, and there he lies buried. Brilliant and flighty, he was described by his Florentine contemporary, Niccolo Machiavelli as "the greatest spendthrift of our time, or any other." Naturally, Vienna loved him.

Maximilian's grandson, Charles V (d. 1558), was more cosmopolitan. Born and brought up in the Netherlands, he inherited from his Austrian-

French father the Low Countries, the Franche Comté (the Burgundy-Jura area of modern France) and all the traditional Habsburg possessions. From his Spanish mother he acquired, at the age of eighteen, the crown of Spain and the greatest colonial empire in the world, including the known parts of Central and South America and sizable tracts of what was to become the United States of America. The sun, his courtiers boasted somewhat loosely, never set on his realms. AEIOU became merely a pithy summary of the Habsburg imperial mission.

The universalist vocation implicit in the family slogan developed, with the post-medieval Habsburgs into more than a passion for collecting real estate; it was at once their glory, and their undoing. Though the Habsburgs could hardly be called a family of intellectuals, their story is intertwined with the history of ideas since the sixteenth century, to a degree unmatched in that of any other European dynasty. In each century, right up to the twentieth, as Professor Taylor points out, they identified themselves with some great ideological movement and became the foremost champions of some supranational cause of doctrine. The causes were generally lost ones, and the ideas unpopular, but they were not always so retrograde as they seemed to those who held opposing views. The peculiar tragedy of the Habsburgs is that they were usually as far ahead of their age in some respects as they were behind it in others. They were historic failures, in the sense that they consistently missed achieving their major goals, but they count among the most imposing, or even glorious, failures in history.

"Glorious failure" is certainly the appropriate epitaph for Charles V, the greatest monarch of the Renaissance. For thirty years this essentially peace-loving, introverted, deeply religious man rode at the head of his armies, back and forth across the face of Europe, from the Netherlands to Sicily, from Spain to the Danube, pursuing the grand medieval dream of Christian and European unity. The pursuit was a hopeless one. Charles did succeed in saving much of Europe from Turkish invasion, an achievement that today is sometimes underrated, but the spread of Lutheranism had irremediably split the Western church, and the rise of the nation-state inexorably doomed the Continent to political compartmentation. Charles' victory over his French colleague, Francis I, at the Battle of Pavia was in one respect a triumph of the supranational over the national ideal, but it was the last meaningful one Europe was to see for nearly four centuries. Though neither Francis nor England's Henry VIII could equal Charles' spread, their dynasties were more firmly rooted in the soil of their homelands. The mere extent of Charles' scattered empire made it ungovernable in an age of rudimentary communications. Eventually he had to admit his limitations. Sick and exhausted from his labors, he retired at the age of fifty-six to a small country house in Spain, and renounced the Imperial crown with the Habsburg family holdings in Central Europe, in favor of

his brother Ferdinand; at the same time he handed over the Spanish crown to his son Philip, thus splitting into two allied but separate parts the greatest concentration of power in Europe since Charlemagne.

The story of the Spanish Habsburgs is a long decline from grandeur, ending in 1700 when the branch became extinct.

The Austrian line, at first considered as poor relations by their magnificent Spanish cousins, was to go on playing a splendid, if increasingly tragic, role for much longer. It continued to champion the cause of Europe against the Turks for more than a century, after crusading had gone out of fashion (though the need for it was greater than ever); the last Moslem assault was thrown back under the walls of Vienna in 1683. The wars against the Turks earned the Habsburgs numerous rewards in addition to the crusader's halo and the legendary sack of coffee the foe had abandoned on the battlefield. In return for their protection against the infidel, the Bohemians and the Hungarians offered their vacant thrones (in 1526) to Ferdinand I, not to become part of the Holy Germanic Roman Empire over which he ruled, but in personal unions that were supposed to respect their separate national sovereignties. In the seventeenth century the Emperor Leopold I declared the ancient crowns of St. Stephen (Hungary) and St. Wenceslas (Bohemia-Moravia, that is roughly modern Czechoslovakia) as hereditary possessions of the Habsburg family, along with the Holy Roman one made for Otto the Great in 962 and the almost equally famous Iron Crown of Lombardy. At the same time he began the process of whittling away Hungarian and Czech liberties, thus planting the seeds of two particularly virulent nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalisms. Their future growth proved all the more tangled and prickly because in swallowing up the ancient Kingdom of Hungary, the Habsburgs, like a big fish devouring a slightly smaller one with the remains of an undigested minnow still sticking in its throat, had recognized the claim of their new Magyar vassals to the lands of the no-less ancient Kingdom of Croatia, absorbed by Hungary in the twelfth century after it had two centuries of national independence behind it. As Gordon Shepherd remarks in his *Austrian Odyssey*, the "South Slav Problem" which was to be one of the crucial issues of the twentieth century, had its roots in the